

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Robert Tsumura

Robert Tsumura was born in Lāna‘i City, Lāna‘i in 1939.

His parents, originally from Honolulu, O‘ahu, moved to Lāna‘i two years prior.

His father, Masashi “Mustache” Tsumura, initially employed as a field work supervisor, later became a personnel supervisor and athletic coordinator for the Hawaiian Pineapple Company. Still later, he became director of the Lāna‘i Community Welfare Association that took care of the island’s gym, theater, bowling alley, and other services.

His mother, Helen Tsumura, was employed in the Hawaiian Pineapple Company administrative office.

Robert Tsumura and his younger sister attended Lāna‘i High and Elementary School and Mid-Pacific Institute in Honolulu, O‘ahu. During his summer vacations, he, too, worked for Hawaiian Pineapple Company, picking pineapple and helping in the experimental department.

He studied at the University of Hawai‘i and entered military service. Later, he held various jobs before a long career with Island Movers.

Retired since 2001, he and his family reside on O‘ahu.

Tape Nos. 56-17-1-11 and 56-18-1-11

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Robert Tsumura (RT)

Honolulu, O‘ahu

March 29, 2011

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

WN: March 29, 2011 and we’re interviewing Robert Masaru Tsumura for the Lāna‘i City oral history project. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Good morning, Bobby.

RT: Good morning, good morning.

WN: First question I wanted to ask you—tough question—when and where you were born.

RT: When and where?

WN: Yeah.

RT: I was born 1939 at Lāna‘i City Community Hospital, I think it was, at that time. And I believe Dr. [William H.] Wilkinson, I think, may have been my doctor. I’m not sure. [Dr. Wilkinson practiced on Lāna‘i 1941–1952.]

WN: Okay, tell me about your father. Why was he on Lāna‘i at the time you were born?

RT: My dad [Masashi “Mustache” Tsumura] went to Lāna‘i in 1937. He was born in Honolulu, went to McKinley High School, played football for his, at that time, coach, who was Neal [S.] Blaisdell, who [eventually] became the mayor [of the City & County of Honolulu]. After high school, my dad worked at the Pineapple Research Institute up at the University of Hawai‘i. At that time, Neal Blaisdell was the personnel director for Hawaiian Pineapple Company. Apparently, a job opening was on Lāna‘i, and Neal Blaisdell told my dad, “You’re going to Lāna‘i.” (Chuckles) He was kind of a rascal guy, so I guess Blaisdell thought, “Good move for him to move to Lāna‘i.” So he went to Lāna‘i and then saw the place, came back, picked up my mom, and they both went to Lāna‘i. My mom said she cried because the boat parked outside the [Kaunapali] Harbor; they had to go down in a row boat and row into the harbor at that time because the harbor wasn’t fully developed. She was wearing her nice clothes and got all wet. So it wasn’t a good experience, but they lived there for years and years, and they never decided to move back to Honolulu.

WN: What part of Honolulu was your father from?

RT: I guess you would call it, “Pālama,” but it’s right across from ‘A‘ala Park. Right there was a little lane—‘A‘ala Lane—right where Toyo Theater, Kokusai Theater all those theaters were. They lived in a little lane and from there, he went to—he was supposed to go to Central Intermediate [School], but he went to Washington [Intermediate School] because Washington had a football program. Intermediate had a football program, so he wanted to play football. Then from Washington, he went to McKinley [High School].

WN: Can you tell us what you know about your father’s family background? Like his parents?

RT: Okay, my father’s father was a fisherman, just on a small, outboard motor, fishing. At that time, I don’t know if you recall, Nu‘uanu Stream, which goes right down into Honolulu Harbor, all the fishermen used to have their boats tied up to the sides of the street, and their little metal ladders that they would climb down, jump in their boat, and go out fishing. So he had a boat there, and they lived quite close, you know, about a block away, not even. So he was a fisherman, and my grandma was a stay-home, take-care-the-family grandma. My grandfather died on the boat. From what I understand is, he was off where the airport is now, going to ‘Aiea to go pick up another friend to go fishing with, and his boat exploded and caught fire. So he died on the boat. That was a long time ago because my dad was still, I believe, in intermediate school or something like that. And then Grandma—I hardly knew her. I hardly knew them. But when I was born on Lāna‘i, she made the trip to Lāna‘i to make sure I had five fingers and five toes and everything else on each hand. (Chuckles) But she came, too, because I was the first Tsumura grandson to be born.

My mother is McKinley High School, too, but she was from Punchbowl area.

WN: What is your mother’s name?

RT: Helen Kiyoko Fukunaga.

WN: And she’s from Punchbowl . . .

RT: Punchbowl area.

WN: And what about her family? What do you know of her family background?

RT: Not too much. I don’t know what Grandpa did—Fukunaga—because by the time I got to know him, he was much older. Grandma used to do laundry for all the people in the Punchbowl area. They would bring clothes, she would do their laundry and iron. I remember we were fortunate because from Lāna‘i, my parents always brought us to Honolulu for Christmas or summer and stuff like that. Then Grandma would ask us to write the amount that the customer owed. She’d tell us, and we’d write it for her, and sometimes help her deliver the clothes. She’d iron it, you know, real stiff—real old starch kind—wrap it in paper, and then we’d help her carry to the customer’s home.

WN: And your grandparents on your mother and father’s side, were they both first generation?

RT: Yes, yes.

WN: And your father’s side, where were they from?

RT: From Hiroshima [Prefecture].

- WN: Hiroshima.
- RT: Yeah.
- WN: Okay, and your mother's side?
- RT: My mother was Kumamoto [Prefecture].
- WN: Kumamoto, okay.
- RT: Yeah.
- WN: So they didn't speak too much English to you folks?
- RT: No, hardly. We were so young that, you know, broken English but lot of Japanese. But we never picked it up.
- WN: And you said your father worked for the Pineapple Research Institute.
- RT: Mm-hmm [yes].
- WN: This is after he had a football career at McKinley?
- RT: Yeah, after high school, I guess he must've done all kind, but he ended up at Pineapple Research Institute.
- WN: Do you know what kind of work he did?
- RT: Not really. We had a picture of him doing something with the pineapple plant research institute, but we don't know what he did.
- WN: And while he was working at UH—Pineapple Research Institute—where were you folks living?
- RT: Well, we weren't born yet.
- WN: Oh, that's right! (Laughs)
- RT: We weren't born yet.
- WN: Sorry about that. (Laughs)
- RT: We weren't born till after they moved to Lānaʻi. I came first and then my sister, who was one year younger, came the following year.
- WN: Okay, so your father moved to Lānaʻi in 1937.
- RT: Yes.
- WN: They were married already, your parents?
- RT: Yeah, I think they were married, and he went over and then came back to pick her up, something like that. (Chuckles)

- WN: Okay, so what kind of work did he do at Hawaiian Pineapple Company?
- RT: I think, initially, he was like a field foreman or supervisor—going out in the fields and stuff. Then eventually, he got into the, I would say, personnel area. But he was doing a lot of—what would you call it—athletic activities for the company. He would coordinate baseball, basketball—he was doing a lot of athletic things for the company. He got out of the fields and went into the personnel office. He brought, I remember, while he was there—the Harlem Globetrotters to Lāna‘i. I don’t know if you remember this boxer Dado Marino, he was very popular on Lāna‘i because of the many Filipino workers. He came to Lāna‘i. My dad was involved with more athletic kind [of activities]. He used to referee basketball games, umpire baseball games. Those days, we had several teams playing baseball and basketball.
- MK: You know, in those days, what were the facilities like for athletic events?
- RT: We had the old gym, which is still there. The baseball field is no longer there. It’s now full of—it’s all homes in that area. But we had a regular baseball field and the gym, and the plantation took care of maintaining the field and the gym.
- MK: And when you talk about like the different teams that they had, were they like workers’ teams or the children of workers?
- RT: Well, they started off with a lot of workers’ teams. The Filipino group had a baseball team. There were about three or four teams. The Filipinos had a team, and one of the stores sponsored a team. So there were about three or four teams in a baseball league. And basketball was the same thing—same situation. Groups of guys would get together, form a team, play. You know, there were a lot of activities during those times.
- MK: You know, those teams, what kinds of names did they have?
- RT: Okay, the Filipino team—one I only remember LFCA, Lāna‘i Filipino Community Association. There was one team sponsored by a store called Mer-Mart. And there was another team called the Cardinals. They were coached by Sadao Miyamoto. He was a surveyor on Lāna‘i. Sadao would’ve been a really interesting person [to interview]. He surveyed the whole island. But he used to coach this team called, I think it was the Cardinals. Then eventually, they started a Little League. I guess I was, what—ten, eleven [years old]. They started a Little League there. We had Yankees, Red Sox. I think only two or three teams, again. With people in the community, yeah. But it was all fun and played at the regular ball field, and all the parents, of course, would come out and cheer us on.
- MK: You know, with your dad having been an athlete—you know, as a kid, right, from intermediate school on up—did he participate in the games, too?
- RT: Not too much. As far as I know, he might have initially—maybe before we were born or whatever. But after we were born, I only remember him officiating. Referee at basketball games and umpiring a little bit. But I don’t remember him really playing. I think he was coaching or something, I don’t know.
- MK: And then was he ever involved in football again? As a coach or . . .

- RT: Lānaʻi had basically two football teams—the high school team and the team made up of the older people. That was the extent of the football team. But he never got involved with coaching, I think. I think he might've helped, but I don't recall too much.
- WN: So your dad refereed and things like that as an employee of Hawaiian Pineapple Company?
- RT: That's correct.
- WN: And so these teams that he was—under his jurisdiction—were like employees? Or would they encompass, you know, like kids of employees and . . .
- RT: He ran like a recreation program for the company.
- WN: The company employees.
- RT: Employees. Then from there, the community also developed. That's why I said they started the Little League and stuff like that. As far as the high school, teams used to come in from Maui because we were a part of the Maui Interscholastic League, so teams used to come from Maui, Lānaʻi used to go to Maui. There used to be a Maui County Tournament—Molokaʻi, Lānaʻi, and the teams on Maui. The winner of that would come to Honolulu for the territorial tournaments, so to speak.
- WN: You're talking about high school? This is like high school sports, right?
- RT: Yeah, high school sports. As far as other kind, it was strictly employee-type recreation for the community people. We didn't get outside teams coming and stuff like that. Not too much of that.
- MK: And then like you mentioned that he brought in like the Harlem Globetrotters. That was sponsored by HAPCO [Hawaiian Pineapple Company]?
- RT: I think so, I think so. I mean, to come to Lānaʻi—small gym and everything—it was really something to remember.
- MK: Who did they play against though?
- RT: They have their team that they travel with.
- MK: And then like you mentioned, like Dado Marino was brought in for a boxing match.
- RT: Well, they'd set up a ring in the old gym on the stage, and everybody's around. He would just go through shadowboxing like—but just for him to be there was a big thrill for our community.
- MK: Big thrill, yeah.
- WN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [yes].
- RT: But it was interesting because there were a lot of activities, so to speak, for us, you know. Not a lot of football—with only the high school team—but baseball and stuff like that. So it was really exciting.
- MK: So your dad's work was primarily in personnel and also community sports activities, sponsored by the company?

RT: Yeah, and then my dad eventually took over—there was a Lāna‘i Community [Welfare] Association. He became director of the Lāna‘i Community [Welfare Association], which almost was like a company-run thing, but it was a community association. They took care of the gym, the theater, the bowling alley, and stuff like that. There was, again, more recreation activities. On Lāna‘i, there’s a wading pond way out that end, across from the hotel. They initiated that, digging that out and—it never really got completely done, but the steps and everything. They dug out that pool. They called it a wading pool. But that was with the Lāna‘i Community [Welfare] Association. He spent some time with them.

WN: And how was the Lāna‘i Community [Welfare] Association funded? Was it Maui County?

RT: I think partly county and partly the company helped out and stuff like that. It was more a county type function. But because Lāna‘i was so small, Dole really helped out. Dole did a lot for us.

MK: So when he was with that association, he took care of like the teams?

RT: He just kind of---pretty much same as he was doing with the company, except with a different title, different name.

MK: And then he also took on like the theater?

RT: The theater was part of that . . .

MK: Bowling alley?

RT: Yeah, the bowling alley. They was all part of that [Lāna‘i] Community [Welfare] Association thing.

WN: Swimming pool? Was there a swimming pool?

RT: No, there wasn’t a swimming pool. Swimming pool came when [David] Murdock came.

RT: That was his gift to the city.

MK: And then how about the golf course?

RT: Golf course was always there, always run by the company. When I say the company—Hawaiian Pineapple or Dole or whatever—they took care of it. And because we only had that nine-hole, free golf course at that time.

WN: So this is Cavendish Golf Course?

RT: Cavendish, yes. It’s pretty much remained the same from what it was many, many years ago. Just go up and play whenever you wanted to, right? They said there’s a donation box, but I don’t think anybody ever donated.

(Laughter)

You know, we had one of my friends who lived across the street from us. He won the—I think the Territorial Junior Amateur, or something—[Tutomu] “Tomu” Sakuma. He came to Honolulu—one of the big things he had to do was buy a pair of golf shoes because he used to play on Lāna‘i all barefooted. But he won it—he came here [Honolulu], he played against Ted

Makalena. I don't know how he did—he did very well though. So we have one good golfer came out of Lānaʻi. (RT and WN laugh).

WN: Neal Tamashiro . . .

RT: The Tamashiro boys are all good—Neal, Les, they are all good golfers. I think Les is the better of all of them, I think. But Tomu was—oh, he's about five, six years older than I am. They live right across—family had a lot of boys—big family, right across the street from us.

WN: Now it's interesting because, you know, back in your father's day or your day, the company was the number one. I mean, today, people rely on the county, right?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: The county for the gyms and things like that, yeah.

RT: Right.

WN: And even sometimes, the unions have these leagues, right?

RT: Right.

WN: But in those days, it was pretty much the company that was . . .

RT: The company kind of organized and got everybody involved. And like I said, growing up, there was a lot of things. When they did away with the baseball field, it was kind of a disappointment, but prior to that, it was a lot of things going on. I remember we played Little League, came to Honolulu, played in the old Honolulu Stadium, which was a big thrill for us. It was a lot of fun, a lot of fun.

MK: You know, like you were saying, they got rid of the baseball field?

RT: Well, the original baseball field, which is—you know where the industrial area was, where all the [company] trucks used to park? Right across the street, there was housing for summer employment. Now, there's senior homes in that area too. That whole block—well, almost the whole block—was a baseball field. It extended from Lānaʻi Avenue all the way down to the—I don't know what the next road was, but they had a baseball field there. So it was really neat.

WN: So your father's job as the athletic coordinator, you know, representing HAPCO [Hawaiian Pineapple Company]—that's a big job, right?

RT: It was, I think, but those days, everybody helped, everybody cooperated. It was easy to get people to volunteer and stuff. Because we were such a small community, I think everybody kind of pulled together to make things happen. You know, after Little League on Lānaʻi, I remember playing with the older guys, I mean, what I consider the older guys. But it was just, you know, that's what you had to deal with, right? There's not enough to form many teams, so the old guys—some of them would still continue playing. But it's some good fun, good feeling.

MK: You know, I know that you were born in 1939 . . .

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: And then the war starts in '41 . . .

RT: Yes.

MK: Ends in '45. You're still really, really young, so you probably don't have that many memories of that time, but I was wondering, what had you heard, maybe, about your dad at that time?

RT: Well, it's funny. Certain things, you remember, yeah? Like we had just a single light bulb hanging from a wire. The light bulbs were all painted black with a small, little hole on the bottom so the light only shined straight down. I remember all the windows—we had window panes, four to a window, all with black paper on or black paint. So the windows were all blacked out, the light bulbs were such that there's one small light shining straight down. The cars, some of the cars, like the company trucks—primarily trucks—their headlights were all painted black, and they had this one small—like a shield sort of light when it shined straight down. It barely could illuminate the ground. But little things like that, and you know, I was only what, four, five, six. But little things like that, I still remember.

And there were air raids. Sirens would go off. We lived just before going up to *Haole* Camp. We all had bomb shelters in the back of our houses. Ours was just dug into the ground and nothing. Our neighbor had a nice one—roof on, door, benches inside. So we would go to the neighbor's bomb shelter. That was Mrs. [Hanako] Sawada, you know. They lived right next to us, in fact. But every time the sirens go on, Mrs. Sawada would make *musubi*. Get everybody—we'd all go to their bomb shelter because they had light, they had the benches, they had a door, a roof over it. And she'd have her *musubi*, and we'd sit there until it was all clear and come back out.

WN: How many people did it hold?

RT: Well, we had four of us—my mother and father and my sister and I. And the Sawadas—I think only the husband and wife. I think the boys had already left the island. But it was neat. They had a real nice bomb shelter (chuckles).

WN: And you folks had the not-so-nice one . . .

RT: We had the plain, dug in a hole . . .

(Laughter)

RT: A hole in the ground kind, you know.

WN: Didn't everyone have one though? Was that required?

RT: Pretty much everybody had a bomb shelter in the back of their house.

MK: Were most like yours? Or like Mrs. Sawada's?

RT: I think most like ours, yeah. Mrs. Sawada had the nicest one. (MK laughs.) Her husband, I guess, really did well. It had a door, everything. See, those are the things I remember, I was young, but I remember going there, and she would have *musubi*. Never failed, she'd always have *musubi*.

WN: Were there like canned goods and stuff in there?

RT: No, they didn't keep food supply in there, you know. Because I mean, it was just close by [the house] and you're not staying there forever. Because the sirens would go off, we'd go in a bomb shelter. But then all clear and then you come out and go home.

MK: Like how often would the siren go off?

RT: I don't know how often, but I remember it going off—big siren going off because the power plant was down the hill from where we lived. So it wasn't that often. Then we had a contingent of army personnel on the island. Hotel Lāna'i, the old—the small one—right back there, there are some trees. There were some army barracks back there. Just a small group of army people. But, I mean, there's nothing on Lāna'i, right, so we were pretty safe, I think. (WN and MK chuckle.) But the sirens would go off, and you go in. The lights, I remember. It was really neat, (chuckles). And remember, everything was kerosene stove. Everybody had a tank in their yard. The company would come by with the big tank and fill up your kerosene. That was pretty neat.

WN: This was all the time, not just wartime, right?

RT: No, all the time.

WN: Kerosene.

RT: We had kerosene stoves.

WN: So let's talk about your house. Try to describe your house for us. You were born in 1939.

RT: Well, Lāna'i is all plantation homes. We were up next to where Hotel Lāna'i was on that next hill. That was our first home. Again, it was company-provided—big yard, couple bedrooms, I guess.

WN: What block was this?

RT: You know, I cannot remember. I want to say block seventeen, but I'm not really sure. Or block thirty-six. I've been thinking about it, and (WN chuckles) it used to be, "Oh where you live?"

"Block thirty-six, house two." Right?

But I cannot remember. But the Sawadas were next to us, the Benanuas were next to them. But we had about five or six homes in our row.

The whole plantation home was—I would say, a two-bedroom, one bath. I mean, ample room for us. Big yard, so everybody grew vegetables or raised chickens or ducks or whatever. At that house, I think we had rabbits. But one day, my mom saw the rabbit after my dad had skinned it and everything, and rabbit flesh quivers, yeah?

WN: Oh.

RT: She saw it move, and we never had rabbit after that.

(Laughter)

RT: That was the end of rabbits. We stayed in that house until I was in elementary school, I guess. Then we moved out to across from Cavendish [Golf Course]. One of the [company] supervisors,

Mr. Namba, used to have that house. He moved to Honolulu with his family. He had a lot of rocks, like a Japanese yard, big rocks, bamboo all over the place. So when we first moved there, I remember crawling under the house and pulling out bamboo, cleaning up. But the house was really nice—fishpond, everything. My dad got that house. That was a three-bedroom house. So we stayed there, and we still have that house. And that was when, I guess I was in elementary school.

MK: You know, like your first house, what were the—say, the toilet facilities or bathing facilities like?

RT: We had a shower and toilet—indoors. That house was an indoor house. Some of the houses in the camps had all the outdoor stuff. But I remember going to friends' house and going to the community bath—big building—one side is men, one side, ladies. You just go in, and you climbed up, and big *furo*—I mean, huge. And they had the outdoor toilets and stuff like that. I remember the community baths. Each camp had one. Even community wash areas—laundry areas—there was a big shed, and inside, [wash] tubs, and everybody had their big *tarai*. And outdoors, had fire. You boil the water to get the clothes clean. You'd scrub with scrub boards. Go outside, boil it. I remember as kids, after the wood is all burnt up, we would go steal potatoes from people's yard, put the potatoes underneath [the coals], and cook the potatoes. But again, it was so much fun. I guess the company put all those up. It was a nice, enclosed area with a fire place outside to hold the tubs and boil the clothes. That was right down the street from our house—where we were.

The *furos*, I remember going to that. When we moved up to the other side, across the street from us in the back was an outdoor toilet. We used to climb on the roof and jump down and do all kinds of stuff—it was a playground. (Chuckles) So it was fun. And then---I didn't do it, but every now and then, people would light paper and throw it in, and all the paper in there would start catching fire, and the fire engines would have to come put out the fire. (Chuckles) It's little things just growing up on the island was so much fun.

WN: So in your first house, you said you had a shower?

RT: Yeah, we had a shower and toilet.

WN: Was that unusual?

RT: Yeah, it was. Because most of the rest of the homes didn't have. Eventually, what happened was the company started building little add-ons to the existing houses—with a bathroom and a shower and stuff and a laundry area. So if you go to Lāna'i, you look at some of the homes—the older homes—you see like a little lean-to in the back. That was their laundry area and the shower area. They had a little concrete slab, and they built it around there. But they just added on to the existing [structure]. We were really lucky, we had all that in our house where we were.

WN: So you had shower and, what, toilet too?

RT: Yeah, in the house.

WN: So you remember indoor plumbing from long before.

RT: From when we were born, yeah.

- MK: You know, because your dad was like, you know, the field supervisor—like the *luna* in the beginning. and then he became a personnel worker . . .
- RT: I think that had something to do with it.
- MK: . . . did that make a difference?
- RT: I think that did. Because like the house we moved to, Mr. Namba was a supervisor or foreman or *luna* or stuff like that. So their homes were a little better equipped than, you know, the regular plantation homes. They were just small, little homes—no toilet, no bath. But I remember when they started adding on the bath and the shower facilities. Every home, they just put that little lean-to in the back, and it was pretty neat there. All the homes started having that.
- MK: And then when you were telling us about your first home near Hotel Lāna‘i, you mentioned that one of your neighbors was the Benanua family . . .
- RT: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: . . . and you know, like in sugar plantations, usually it would be like ethnic groups, yeah? But Benanua is . . .
- RT: Hawaiian.
- MK: Hawaiian.
- RT: Yeah, yeah.
- MK: You folks are Japanese.
- RT: Yeah, yeah.
- MK: How was it in Lāna‘i?
- RT: You know, it’s pretty well mixed. There was no Japanese camp or Filipino camp or whatever. As far as the work force, everybody kind of was together. You had Japanese, Filipinos, Hawaiians all together. Only up on the hill. The hill was all the *haole* people. Yeah, all the bosses lived on the hill. But everything else---everything was mixed.
- MK: What did you folks call the hill?
- RT: Snob Hill. But we used to call it *Haole* Camp, because in those days, all the managers were all up on the hill, and that was *Haole* Camp. We would go up occasionally—the young guys—we would go up and challenge the *haole* kids to baseball or football or something. But pretty much that whole hillside, behind Hotel Lāna‘i, and we were just like the cutoff. From there up was all the managers. But see, we went to school with them. They went to school with us, so we would go up to their homes sometimes and play and stuff like that. So it wasn’t real animosity. You know, they just lived there, and we lived down here kind of stuff.
- WN: How many bedrooms did your house have? Your first house and your second house.
- RT: I think the first one had two bedrooms, and I think the second one had three. The second one was a big house—big lot, everything. That was really big.

MK: And then, like you mentioned that you folks had like vegetables, chickens, rabbits—until your mom . . .

RT: Yeah.

MK: . . . saw the quivering rabbit flesh, yeah.

RT: Then our house where we live in now, my dad built a big pen in the back. We used to raise chickens, turkeys—chickens primarily. The turkeys lasted until a pack of wild dogs came down, they tore into the cage. We had dead turkeys all over the place, (chuckles) so that was the end of the turkeys. My mom didn't want to do that again (chuckles). But they just got into the cage, and it was a big, open cage, and they just got through, and the turkeys were all gone. I can't do it now, but we used to kill the chickens, cut the neck, drain the blood, put it in boiling water, pluck off all the feathers. But I can't do that anymore (chuckles.)

MK: And then when you say you folks had like chickens, like how many would you have?

RT: Not a whole lot. Enough for laying eggs. Maybe a dozen? Because I remember, we had to bring the chickens in from Honolulu, and they came in little boxes, all these chickies. Cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep! Make noise, and you pick them up from the barge and bring them home. That was pretty neat.

MK: So you had your eggs. You didn't have to worry about eggs.

RT: Yeah, pretty much. Not a whole bunch, but every now and then, we'd have eggs and stuff like that. And it was just, you know, (chuckles) country living at its best.

MK: And then when you say you folks grew your vegetables, what kind did you folks grow?

RT: Oh, we had lettuce, carrots, cabbage, beans—pretty much the things you would need as staple vegetables. Almost every family, I would say, on Lāna'i grew vegetables and flowers. So people would trade, "Oh, I got a lot of this." They would trade. So, as I say, it was just fun.

WN: And so what foods did you have to rely on buying in stores?

RT: Meat. Eventually chicken (RT and WN chuckle), they would stock. Fish, pretty much, you had ample supply of fish. You either went fishing yourself, or people would bring over. So meat, canned goods . . .

WN: Rice.

RT: Rice, of course. At that time, I guess Richard's and Pine Isle were the only two primary . . .

WN: Richard's Shopping Center . . .

RT: Yeah.

WN: . . . and Pine Isle Market.

RT: Pine Isle Market, yeah.

MK: So where did the meat come from?

RT: I think from Maui, it must be Maui. Because see, I cannot remember the timeline, but until the airlines came, we used to catch the boat from Lānaʻi, go to Lahaina—Māla Wharf in Lahaina—and then catch the bus from there to the old airport, which was in Puʻunēnē, Maui, catch a plane, come to Honolulu. (WN chuckles.) So we would get up pretty early. I think the boat left about six o'clock in the morning, and it was a slow boat, and if you caught fish, the boat would stop until they haul in the fish. They had the trolling lines out. So if they catch *mahimahi*, the boat would slow down, the crew would pull in the fish, put it away, then continue on. So it's not just going—they're fishing on the side (chuckles).

WN: Were they just doing it for on their own, though?

RT: Yeah, just on their . . .

WN: That wasn't a fishing boat or anything . . .

RT: No, no, it was just a boat, and you all pile in the boat. I can't even remember how big—it was not that big a boat. You kind of just sat on deck, in the back. You go to Maui, catch the bus. By the time you get to Honolulu, it's about two o'clock in the afternoon. So it was an all-day trip. Going back, same thing, right? Honolulu to Maui, catch the boat, come back to Lānaʻi.

WN: Wow. So just getting from Lahaina to Puʻunēnē, that's a long drive, yeah.

RT: On the bus, yeah, on the bus.

WN: Yeah. Okay, we're going to change tapes right now.

RT: Okay.

END OF TAPE NO. 56-17-1-11

TAPE NO. 56-18-1-11

WN: Okay, this is tape number two, session one, with Robert Masaru Tsumura.

And you were talking about, you know, going—the trip—the ordeal that you go through to go from Lānaʻi to Honolulu. And you said that your mother didn't like it.

RT: She didn't like it; she would get sick. Every time, she would get sick. But that was the only way to come to Honolulu. So we would come to Honolulu at least twice a year. She went through it all just to come here. Once she got here, she was fine, but then going back is the same thing.

MK: And at what times would she come to Honolulu? Like . . .

RT: Christmas, summertime. When we were out of school. We'd come here for a week or so then go back. Christmas, we'd come here and spend Christmas with her family or my father's family, and then we'd go back.

MK: And you were saying you'd have to pack up all your stuff . . .

RT: Yeah, you packed the suitcase and go down to the harbor, get on board, pack it into the bus, take the trip, get in the airplane on Maui, and go to Honolulu. But they did it, you know. It was an experience, which was a good experience, good fun. I don't know exactly when the airlines started to come into Lānaʻi, but Aloha Airlines, I think, were one of the first ones to come over with the DC-3s. That was, again, an adventure, because Lānaʻi Airport was so much smaller than it is now. But they made it okay.

WN: That must've been a big thing when the DC-3 came, yeah?

RT: Oh, what a big difference, right? Because you eliminate going to—half a day just going to Maui. But it was fun. That's the good part—it was fun.

WN: So you said that one of the things you did was to kill the chicken, drain the blood, you know, pluck the feathers, and stuff.

RT: Yeah.

WN: What other chores did you have?

RT: Work in the yard with the vegetables, you know. Pull weeds. Like when we planted lettuce, you got to thin out the lettuce because the seeds all grow one time. We got to thin out and replant. Clean the yard, basically, and wash the car. We had a car. Of course, I liked to wash the car because I could drive it. I didn't have a license, but I would drive it next to our house, go underneath the tree, and polish it up and everything, then I can drive it back to. . . .

(Laughter)

WN: So what was your first car, you remember?

RT: Oh, must be a 1947 Ford or some sort. Then we had a '52 Chevrolet. A lot of people had Jeeps on Lānaʻi. I think the first car I drove was a Jeep. One of our friends had a Jeep, and he said, "You want to drive? Okay, jump in." I drove it home. (Laughs) I guess, I mean, everybody knew each other, right? The policemen were all friendly. In fact, the police officer that I got—I got my license on Lānaʻi—but he and I were on the same baseball team. I was telling you the age difference—but he was a police officer. So I said, "Hey, I got to come down and get my drivers license."

He said, "I thought you got it already; I see you driving all around."

(Laughter)

RT: But that's the way it was, you know. So I went down. He said, "Well, let's go around the block, so at least I can say I took you around the block," and you got your driver's license. But pretty much everybody was driving before—I mean, not a lot, but to and from, you know. "Oh, you're at my house, you're going home—drive home." But that's the part of growing up on Lānaʻi. The policemen were friendly. There was hardly any crime those days. If there was a crime, they probably knew who did it, so they just go see the person. Because you couldn't go anywhere, and the policemen were all pretty much really friendly people. The lieutenant was strict. (Chuckles)

MK: Now, I'm curious, how old were you when you were driving?

RT: Must've been about eleven, twelve. (WN chuckles.) You know, and I would wash the car, and I would tell, "Oh, I'm going to polish it," so I'd drive it around the—not around. There were two houses next door, so I'd drive it—they had a tree on the other side, then go park under the tree and bring it back. But we were lucky because we could go on the back road and stuff like that. (Chuckles) It's just things you did. . . .

WN: And it wasn't automatic shift those days.

RT: No, no, it wasn't automatic—it's all standard shift.

MK: So how did you learn? How did you know how to do it?

RT: You just watch. You watch your parents drive, and sometimes, you just jump in. The car's not moving, you jump in and shift and just, after a while, you just pick it up. (WN and MK chuckle.)

I guess young people pick it up a lot faster. My mom had a hard time. She learned to drive on Lāna'i, and my dad would take her out initially, but you know how that goes. He would scold her, she'd get mad at him, and they end up fighting. So then she hired one of our friends, Tony Perry, and he took my mom driving lessons and stuff like that. I remember—I don't know if I should say this, but—my dad took my mom on the airfield. There's a straight line down the middle of the airfield. There wasn't a fence or anything around; you just drive onto the airfield. This was at night because there was no night flights on Lāna'i those days. So you just have her practice driving—follow that line, just go straight down that line. She used to go down and come back. You know, that was part of her training. But then she got her license when she took lessons from Mr. Perry. (WN chuckles.)

WN: Now what kind of work—or did your mom do any kind of . . .

RT: Oh yeah, she worked at the [company] office. My dad was in personnel. My mom worked in that office where the [Lāna'i Culture and] Heritage Center is. Before that, there was an old building there that housed the post office. She was in that building. She was just an office worker. I don't know what she did—payroll, maybe, I don't know.

MK: Oh, and what's your mother's name?

RT: Oh, Helen. Helen Kiyoko Fukunaga.

WN: So what—okay, there's a downtown, right? Over where the businesses were and so forth and so on.

RT: Right, right, right.

WN: What about things like, as a kid, going movies? How did you folks go movies?

RT: Well, you walk to the movie theater and walked home. Almost every Sunday, we would go to the movie. From where we were at the edge of town, you just walk to the movie theater, pay whatever it was—not too much—go in and sit down, and walk home after the movie. I mean, I remember walking in the middle of the road going home. Just walk straight down and nothing. No cars—nothing. But we had classmates who lived up the [Lāna'i] Ranch. Those days there was a population up at the ranch. So I would stop here, but they had to continue, they had to walk up

past the golf course to go home to the ranch. Almost every Sunday, we would go to the movies. Those days, I think they had it pretty much almost three times a day.

WN: And was it mostly American movies?

RT: Most of it American movies, yeah.

WN: And as a kid, did you get an allowance from your parents?

RT: I don't really remember. I think I must've got something. (Chuckles) But I don't really remember. But I remember when I started working in the pineapple fields, you know, you get your paycheck, and it goes to my mom. My mom says, "Okay, deposit it in the bank, and you keep ten dollars," or whatever, and that was your spending money, which was more than enough. But as a kid, I guess we used to get an allowance if we did our chores, you know, clean up and do this. We got by somehow.

WN: And as a kid growing up, what were the rules set forth by your parents and by the company, that you couldn't do?

RT: I don't remember company rules as couldn't do whatever. Parental rules are pretty much the same as they are today: don't climb trees, don't do this, don't do that. But we did—we climbed trees. In front of our house, there was a forest of ironwood trees. We would climb up the trees, sway back and forth, and go tree to tree that way. It was so much fun, but nobody got hurt. You know, to this day, "How come nobody got hurt?" No broken arm, no broken bones. We used to climb up and play master on the trees, and you sway because we were light enough, but heavy enough we could sway the top of the tree to the next tree, jump on, go tree to tree.

WN: How high up are you on the tree?

RT: I would say about twenty feet up.

WN: Woo (chuckles).

RT: Because they were pretty tall trees. Then up at the golf course, we would go get cardboard from the store or from home, and from the top of the hill, we would slide down the dirt. *Chu-chu-chu-chu-chu*. Smash into the guava bush or into the grass. Again, nobody got hurt. (WN chuckles.) You know, it's things that if you saw your child doing, you would panic, you know. But we just did, and it was fun. There were no real restrictions on Lānaʻi. Nothing was cannot do this, cannot do that.

WN: What about---I always wondered this, growing up on Lānaʻi, did you guys steal pineapple?

RT: You didn't have to steal; it was available. The plantation did not restrict taking pineapple. They may have had a restriction, but they never enforced anything like that. Whenever you wanted, you just go pick pineapple. I mean, basically, it's almost next door, yeah? But if you needed pineapple, you just pick the pineapple—whatever you needed—and you know, used it. Like when we would come to Honolulu, we would pick pineapple, make a box of pineapple, bring it to Honolulu because Honolulu people like Lānaʻi pineapple. They said it was the sweetest pineapple they ever tasted. But the company had no restrictions until later, when they started developing the island. From what I understand, a lot of construction people, contractors, they'd load their pickup truck with pineapple, ship it back, and sell it at open markets or stuff like that. I think then they

said, “No more pineapple picking.” But as we were growing up, there was no—like I said, there might have been, but nobody really enforced it because it was pretty much for your own use on the island.

WN: And I would imagine you folks all knew when a pineapple was ripe and . . .

RT: Pretty much so.

WN: . . . where the good-tasting ones were or anything like that?

RT: Yeah, because see, the later the crop, the sweeter the fruit, yeah? So then you would go fields that were later because from the basic plant, one fruit comes out. That’s usually the biggest fruit. It’s not necessarily the sweetest. Then after that dies, the little runners that come out from the base—they all grow pineapple. The last crop before they plow it, the pineapples are really small . . .

WN: Oh yeah.

RT: And they are sweet.

WN: Yeah, yeah, the sugar loaf—they call it.

RT: The sugar pineapple. They’re just sweet. But those are hard to find because they never harvested those, yeah? Because they’re of no practical use for the canning or anything like that. So those, we used to—Honolulu people used to love that. We’d just bring the small ones, fill up a box—and that’s really, really sweet. But you know, when we worked in the pineapple field, we’re kind of spoiled, yeah, Lāna‘i people. In the morning, when you’re working in the pineapple fields, it’s cold the night before, so the fruit is cold. So we’d grab the pineapple, take a slice, take a bite. If it’s sour, you just threw it away. Until you find one, then you may eat not even half of it when we’d throw it away. I mean, it was there. In the morning, the fruit is still cold from the night before because Lāna‘i gets cold at night. But we were kind of spoiled in that sense. I don’t eat that much pineapple now. I was so spoiled eating really sweet pineapple. But working in the pineapple field was another great adventure.

WN: Now how old were you when you first started?

RT: How old was I? I think you had to be fifteen. Or maybe fourteen. Because I think, it’s like Kona, they have this allowance where you can start earlier [as children], picking Kona coffee beans.

WN: Kona coffee, yeah.

RT: Was I in school? I might have been away, so must have been fourteen, fifteen, maybe. I would go back to Lāna‘i every summer and work in the pineapple fields.

WN: Oh, this is after you moved?

RT: I came to boarding school here in Honolulu, so every summer, I would go home and work in the pineapple fields.

WN: Oh that’s right, you went to Mid-Pac [Mid-Pacific Institute], yeah?

RT: I went to Mid-Pac, yeah.

WN: Oh, I didn't write that down. Sorry.

RT: Before that, we used to go because we had older friends. They were working a field. We would go out and visit them—help them pick pineapple. And you know—again, I cannot remember how old we were, but up where the golf course at [The Lodge at] Kō'ele is now, was all pineapples. They used to pick by hand because there were no machines at that time. They pile it on the side of the road, and there was a sizing bar that they used to size the pineapple. Certain size, we put into wooden boxes. These were oil-coated boxes, and you'd size it. The pineapple of certain size go here, certain size go there. The boxes were left on the side of the road. The truck would come, and they load the truck. But that was the earliest. Then once I started working, we had the machines, of course. So we just followed the machines. . . .

WN: You mean the boom [conveyor] harvester?

RT: The boom harvester, yeah.

WN: So when you first started, it was all with the boxes?

RT: The boom already, yeah.

WN: Oh, with the boom already?

RT: Yeah. But we used to go help our friends who were older than us. And there's some—it's not work, it's just good fun, yeah?

(Laughter)

RT: But when I used to go back for the summer, we worked, following the boom. All the men and the boys would work night shifts from three to eleven. All the ladies would work the day shift from seven to four, I think it was, or seven-thirty to four. So the whole community was doing pineapple. Again, it was fun because we would go the store, buy soda, take it out to the girls—our classmates—working in the fields. Give them soda or stuff like that. Nighttime, they would make coffee or something and look for us at night, and they'd bring us coffee and stuff like that. So it was really a social thing too. It was work, but they made it fun. The work was hard work though. If you've ever worked in a pineapple field, you'd do it once; you don't want to do it. It's hard work—dusty, dirty, hot, and it's just. . . .

WN: And the work you did was almost exclusively picking? Or did you do other things? Like picking slips or planting or things like that.

RT: No, I was mostly picking fruit with the conveyer—the belt. But then I moved to---Lāna'i had an experimental department. I got a position with them one summer, and we would go out to different fields and test the fruit for acidity and stuff like that. But that required handpicking, so I learned how to handpick. An old, Filipino man, his name was Lorenzo Madriaga. He would show me how to load—there's a technique to load that bag. You get one strapped around your neck, you have the bag on your arm, and you got to set the fruit a certain way. You set it up. When this is full, the strap comes on this shoulder. Then you stack pineapple on your shoulder, so you're carrying it this way.

WN: Oh. So you fill up the bag first . . .

RT: You fill up the bag. Then you stack what you can on your shoulder with your arms holding it down.

WN: Oh, so it's pressing against your ear?

RT: Yeah, but you get the hat and everything on, so it's not too bad. But if you ever fall down (chuckles), you got to get up. You got to unload and reload again. But it's fun because we only did it on certain fields, only for certain amount of fruit. We'd test the food, weigh the food. We'd slice it up, test for acidity, and stuff like that. But that was a pretty good—like I said, I learned from that how to stack the pineapple. There's an art.

WN: And these pines that you picked—okay, well, for the experimental, that's one thing, but even when you're working on the boom [conveyor] harvester, was this cannery pine . . .

RT: Yeah.

WN: I mean, in other words, you guys took off the crown?

RT: Took off the crown. It was shipped by barge to Honolulu, and canned at Dole—the cannery, yeah.

WN: So everything was pretty much canned. You folks didn't do fresh fruit?

RT: No, they did the fresh fruit much later as they stopped canning because they could do canning from the Philippines and Thailand much cheaper. So then it became only fresh fruit, but that was way after us.

WN: So when you're working the boom, you work—you had one line?

RT: Yeah.

WN: And the guy next to you had a line . . .

RT: Yeah.

WN: And the next had a line . . .

RT: Yeah.

WN: How fast did that boom move?

RT: It's steady. The truck driver who was moving it—he kind of watches, and he kind of sees if people are just moseying along, he'll speed it up just a little bit. (RT and WN chuckle.) You know, and every now and then, he would go too fast, and then everybody would throw crowns at him and stuff like that.

(Laughter)

But then there were times when you want to race against maybe another crew or stuff like that. We tell, "Go, go, go!" The driver just goes, and you're just throwing fruit all over the place. (WN and MK chuckle.) Then the *luna* is in the back, and he's checking all the fruits we missed, right? Because we kind of go too fast. He backed the truck up, and you start all over. But the driver of

the truck pretty much gauged it. Each crew had a *luna*. He would check, be sure you're not missing too many fruit. When there's too many missing, they stop, bring you back.

WN: And was it pretty much—every fruit that's in your line was picked? Or did you have to make some kind of judgment as to, "Eh, this one's not ready."

RT: They would tell you, "Pick half-ripe, or quarter-ripe." What kind of fruit to look for, depending upon the area you're in. See the line, you have fruits on each side. Because each line has left and right, and then everybody has the same. So you're picking left side, right side. And everybody devises ways, flip on the hand, you grab the crown, you flip on the hand, the pineapple flips, falls in the belt. Everybody tries all different kind. Some just flip this way and the fruit will fly, fly. But . . .

WN: Well, you have to snap off the crown, first, yeah?

RT: Yeah, that's how you snap—instead of just snapping, you grab the crown . . .

WN: And grab two?

RT: You can get two one time. You break it off the . . .

WN: Okay, so you're holding two by the crown . . .

RT: You holding two, and then you flip your hand.

WN: Oh! And then the . . .

RT: The fruit will go off.

WN: The fruit will go onto the belt.

RT: Right, and you just drop the crown.

WN: Oh, I see. Oh, I thought you had to go one at a time and . . .

RT: No, no, that's too slow.

WN: . . . twist.

RT: That's why everybody developed their own technique. Some, they grab like this, they flip up this way, so the fruit would come up and flip onto the belt. Then you just drop the crown.

MK: And you know, you were saying like, oh, sometimes they tell you [to pick] quarter-ripe, half-ripe. Is that just a visual determination?

RT: Visual, visual. In fact, sometimes what they do, they used to pick a sample. They'd put it on the top of the boom. They'd say, "Okay, that's what—this color, you're picking. Anything over that [i.e., that color, or darker yellow], you picking." Yeah, so it was pretty set. Then, I guess, depending on what the cannery wanted and everything. Depending upon the field you're in.

WN: And the girls that were picking—they had the same kind of techniques?

- RT: Same stuff. Maybe they can only do one at a time, but the guys—oh, people developed all kind different ways. The old, Filipino men—they had their knife. They'd pick, and they grab the fruit—*chop, choop, pick, chop, choop*—but so steady.
- WN: Steady. Methodical.
- RT: That's more methodical. I mean, just with the knife, they cut. The younger guys, they tried all kind of stuff, being fancy. (RT and WN laugh.) But that was---again, it's so much fun, so much fun.
- WN: Now did you—you guys were assigned a gang every summer. Is that how it worked?
- RT: Yeah. Each summer, whenever you go, you're assigned to a gang and, "Warren is your *luna*," so, okay, Warren is our *luna*. He'd just go with us, go out. Lunchtime was the best because you all sit around in a circle. Everybody has the same lunch—the top half has the *okazu*. It was in the middle. You had the rice. Everybody ate each other's food.
- WN: Oh, so you had *kaukau tin*, and you guys . . .
- RT: Yeah. Two-piece [lunch container, or *kaukau tin*].
- WN: You had your own rice?
- RT: Yeah, rice on the bottom [container]. *Okazu* on the top. So you take off the cover, you put the *okazu* in the middle [of the group]—everybody's sitting around—you had your rice, and you pick [each others' *okazu*]. But then daytime, get plenty pineapple bugs, yeah? So the black little pineapple bugs—they look like rice grains—they fall in the rice, and you picking them out. (WN and MK chuckle.) Or else what we used to do is, we used to gather the old pineapple stumps and light a fire. It smokes, so you're crying and tearing, but it kind of keeps the bugs away.
- WN: And what were you folks wearing every day?
- RT: Jeans. Coveralls over the jeans—like cowboy chaps over the jeans. Boots, of course. Most people wear long-sleeve shirts, but we used to wear t-shirts, and we'd attach a sleeve to it. Like you know when you driving, there's a sleeve you can use . . .
- MK: Mm-hmm [yes].
- RT: And we pin it on. Because otherwise, your arms get all scratched up on the pineapple. Then gloves, of course. Hat. Safety goggles. The ladies, you couldn't tell them apart. They get--- because they don't want . . .
- MK: Too much sun.
- RT: . . . too much sun. They have hat. They get the bandana. You [wore the bandana] across the nose. Only the eyes you can see like that with the safety goggle. So they all look alike. You don't know who (chuckles). But you're completely covered, and it's hot, right? But yet you got to wear the long-sleeve and the boots and the extra clothing. Otherwise, you get all scratched up.
- MK: Like you were saying, daytime it's hot, but nighttime . . .

- RT: Nighttime gets cold. Lānaʻi gets cold because it's like Wahiawā [on Oʻahu]—the elevation—so in the evening, it really gets cold.
- MK: And you talked about the pineapple bugs. Were there other things out there that could really bother you?
- RT: No, mainly the pineapple bugs because they're all over the place, flying, and falling in your food. (Chuckles) But it was---you know, I always say, it was a social event. It was hard work, really hard work, but it really was a social event. You got to meet a lot of people because used to get people from outside islands come over, or maybe a family relative would come over and spend the summer on Lānaʻi and stuff like that. So you'd meet a lot of people, too.
- MK: You know for like you, when you come home during summer to work in the fields, you were living at home with your mom and dad, yeah?
- RT: When I'm back on Lānaʻi?
- MK: Yeah.
- RT: Uh-huh [yes].
- MK: But then the other kids, when they come to work, they're dorming? Summertime.
- RT: Later on, when they were having hard time getting labor, what the company did was, they were recruiting workers from [neighbor island] high schools. They would bring a football team over, put them up in a dorm like—and the whole team would come with the coach, and they would work the pineapple fields. They would practice after work and stuff like that. So the company did that, and they went as far as recruiting workers from Utah, the Mormons from Utah. So they came to Lānaʻi and worked, too. But while we were working, during our [time], it was strictly Lānaʻi people and friends or relatives of Lānaʻi people who would stay with the families. Not too much of the high schoolers or the people from Utah. That was kind of after us because they were getting hard time with [finding] labor.
- WN: So did you work at all with these high school football teams and Utah?
- RT: No, no, I was gone already.
- MK: And then, you know, you were saying, it was like a social event. I was wondering, even if it was a social event, how much did you folks get paid?
- RT: (Chuckles) I think I used to get a dollar fifteen cents [\$1.15] an hour (chuckles).
- MK: Oh.
- RT: But on Lānaʻi, you really didn't need that much money, right? (WN and MK chuckle.) You know, if it was Honolulu, then oh, it was not enough, but on Lānaʻi, I mean, you could bank your paycheck and like I said, keep ten dollars, and that's enough. But I recall, I think, my last pay was about a dollar fifteen cents. Something like that. For us, that's great money, right?
- MK: So what did you do with that money that you got paid during the summers?
- RT: The one I saved?

MK: Yeah.

RT: Of course, you spend it all, right, once the opportunity arrives because I was going to school here in Honolulu.

WN: From what grade did you come to Mid-Pac?

RT: Ninth grade.

WN: Ninth grade, oh.

RT: Nineteen fifty-four, I came out.

WN: So that became like your spending money while you were going school.

RT: Spending money, you know. Buy things—clothes to go school or stuff like that. But it's an experience. It's good. It was fun.

WN: Can you recall what went through your mind when you first found out from your parents that you were going to be sent to Mid-Pac?

RT: (Chuckles) Well, the first thing you say is, "I don't want to go," right? (WN and MK laugh.) Well, I don't want to go to a school in town. You know, I don't know anybody; all my friends are here, stuff like that. The initial reaction. Fortunately, there were some Lānaʻi people ahead of me who were already at Mid-Pac. Wally [Wallace] Tamashiro was one of them. They were ahead of me, so it made it a little easier. But the initial reaction was, "I'm not going. I don't want to go. I wanted to go McKinley [High School] where my father went. (Chuckles) But there was no boarding school [other than Mid-Pacific Institute], and primary [reason] is the boarding. And you know, that was quite an experience, too, being in a boarding school, living with—our school was small. At that time, it was only 300 total; 150 women, 150 guys.

So you lived with them every day, and you make friends during the four years we were there, boarding together. You make friends, really for the lifetime. It's like growing up together. You know, it's just like my friends on Lānaʻi. Because we grew up together, all the way from first grade—kindergarten—to ninth grade, I'm really fortunate because they still include me in their plans. When Lānaʻi [High and Elementary School] has a reunion, they call me. So I'm included in their reunions, like I'm included in the Mid-Pac reunions. But when you grow up together, the bond is there. It's not like you're only seeing each other eight hours or six hours in school and goodbye.

The people who boarded at Mid-Pac were really close. I mean, for four years, you stay with the same people. Some guys had the same roommate for all four years. They choose to have the same roommates, so they're really, really close. But it was fun, and it was strict. Very regimented. Everything was done by bells. The bell rang, you got up. The bell rang, you went down to breakfast. The bell rang, after breakfast, that means you could leave the dining room. Went up back to your room. Bell rings, means you got to go to school. At night, the bell rings, you got to be at your desk studying. You couldn't be walking around or lying on your bed. Bell rings, you have a fifteen-minute break. Bell rings, you got to get back. All night, bells. The last bell rings, you got to be in your room, in your bed. You cannot be studying at your desk; you have to be *pau*—lights out.

And we had to clean our rooms, clean the dorm, the bathroom, and stuff. And you know, the training I had at Mid-Pac for that, when I went into the [U.S.] Army, the army was easy. (WN and MK laugh.) Amazing, the army was easy. We used to really clean, I mean—clean ledges, underneath the shoe, on the shoe rack. Everything had to be dust-free. So as I said, when I went in the army, army was very easy. (WN laughs.)

MK: I was curious, how come your parents decided to send you to Mid-Pac?

RT: I don't really know. They never gave me an answer. (Chuckles) I really don't know why. I know it was—at that time, much cheaper than it is now. But yet, for them, I know it was a struggle. And to have two of us in school at the same—my sister came one year after me—I know it was a struggle, but I guess they felt that's what they wanted to do.

WN: In those days, what was the reputation of the high school on Lānaʻi?

RT: It was all right. We had some really outstanding people on Lānaʻi. Libby [Liberato] Viduya, for one thing, you know. Libby was, in those days, there was FFA—Future Farmers of America. Libby was national orator or something in speech. You know, the school itself, to me, there was nothing wrong with the school. The school was great. I firmly believe in the public school system. Although I went to a private school, I really believe in the public school system because I think the public schools now, too, are developing more students, and the students themselves are going to make a difference. You know, it's what you make of yourself. Going to private school doesn't mean you have an advantage. Maybe in some cases of certain things available. It's the student who decides how far he wants to take himself, and I think the public schools are really good on that now. I really believe.

MK: When you first went to Mid-Pac, what was your hardest adjustment?

RT: Oh, (chuckles) hardest adjustment was being away from family. Because everything was on your own and very strict and very regimented. In fact, my first year there, I was in the dispensary quite often, either a headache or a cold or something. My mother got to a point where she even thought about pulling me out. But it was just one of those things, that transition, I guess. But it's being away from family, and being someplace new and having to learn to live with all these new people. Some guys you've never seen before, and you got to live with them. But, you know, after a while, it becomes family, but initially, it's hard. Especially coming from Lānaʻi. Coming to Honolulu, and I don't know anybody here. (Chuckles) But like I said, fortunately, I had some Lānaʻi people, and they always kind of checked in on us, just to make sure we were okay. Again, it was fun though. (Chuckles)

MK: Meanwhile, at that time, I was wondering, you know, being a young ninth-grader, coming to Honolulu and being with people from other islands and Honolulu, what difference, if any, did you notice between Lānaʻi people and other people? Was there a difference?

RT: Well, maybe. Speaking and talking to them, right? Country style, you have a certain way of talking to each other and everything else. Coming here and having to talk correctly or better. That, and then interacting with the girls. Because the way they did it at Mid-Pac, you had a seating arrangement, and there are eight to a table—four girls and four boys. So now you're having three meals a day with these eight people. And you know, I mean, when you're at home, you just eat and whatever. But [at Mid-Pac] you got to do it . . .

WN: You had to use fork and knife.

RT: Yeah, hard to eat!

(Laughter)

RT: Then, of course, what makes a difference is the people on your table. As a freshman, there's usually a couple of seniors and upperclassmen with you. So it depends on the people you're with. They can help you and make it easier for you, "Ah, don't worry, don't worry." You know, they kind of help you along. But the transition from being at home with parents to being with strangers, so to speak, and learning to eat the proper way and all that. I think that was the hardest thing. But by the time you become a senior, or even a junior, it's easy. Then you can help the new people coming in. That's what was good about boarding because you had the same people every day, so you really became friends with them. Really friends.

WN: You know, you talked about how you speak, you know, to people. I'm just wondering, is there a way that Lānaʻi people talk? In other words, if you were to see someone on the street, and you're talking, can you say, "Eh, you from Lānaʻi!" You know, by just a word . . .

RT: Not really.

WN: Any kind of Lānaʻi pidgin or anything like that?

RT: I think Maui has a more distinct, but it's just Lānaʻi, we were using more pidgin every day, even in school. In school, you were using pidgin. Every day, you're talking to your friends, and it's super pidgin, right? Then going to Mid-Pac was a little different. At first, you don't want to say anything in class, right? You know, teacher calls on you, oh, you don't want to say too much. But it's, again, a part of growing up. I think for everybody, if you are from one element to another, there's some adjustments you have to make, and you got to learn all of that.

WN: Big Island, you know, they say like, "some good," or "broke da mout," and you know.

RT: Yeah. "Broke da mout."

WN: Anything on Lānaʻi? Anything that you can think of? I'm just curious.

RT: Not that I can think of offhand. I'll probably think of something later on that we say and nobody else says, but. . .

WN: Okay. Well, we're out of tape, so we'll stop.

END OF INTERVIEW

Lāna‘i:

Reflecting on the Past; Bracing for the Future

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

December 2014